

Message Text

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SUBJ: WEST BANK ENTERS THE 20TH CENTURY (POLITICALLY)

1. SUMMARY. WE CAUTION AGAINST EARLY SWEEPING INTERPRETATIONS OF RESULTS WEST BANK ELECTIONS. IN MAJOR CENTERS, TRADITIONAL NOTABLES STOOD ASIDE TO MAKE WAY FOR YOUNGER, NATIONALISTIC LEADERS, BUT SITUATION ON WEST BANK EXTREMELY COMPLICATED AND NEWLY-ELECTED MAYORS AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS WILL FIND THEMSELVES THE FOCUS OF WIDELY DIVERGENT PRESSURES AND CONSTRAINTS. THEY WILL HAVE TO RESPOND TO LOCAL ECONOMIC AND ESTABLISHMENT INTERESTS, DEAL WITH HEIGHTENED POLITICAL EXPECTATIONS WHICH THEY THEMSELVES HAVE AROUSED, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME WORKING WITH THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT (MILGOV), AND KING HUSSEIN ON MANY PRACTICAL ISSUES. IN ADDITION TO THIS RATHER TALL ORDER, THEY WILL ALSO BE INFLUENCED AT VARIOUS TIMES BY: ACTIONS OF ISRAELI INSTITUTIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS:

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WEST BANK STUDENTS; THE PLO; COMMUNISTS, SYRIAN BAATHISTS

AND OTHERS. WEST BANK HAS BECOME POLITICIZED WITH PROSPECT FOR INCREASED UNREST AND INSTABILITY. END SUMMARY.

2. APRIL 12 WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS HAVE USHERED IN NEW AND UNCERTAIN ERA IN WEST BANK'S HISTORY. COMMENTATORS AND OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN QUICK TO PROCLAIM LANDSLIDE OF "PRO-PLO" AND "RADICAL" MAYORS AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS. BEFORE MISTAKEN IMPRESSION IS CREATED THAT ARAFAT OR SOME OTHER ARAB LEADER OUTSIDE OF TERRITORY WILL BE MASTERMINDING EVENTS, WE WISH TO UNDERLINE VARIETY AND VARYING STRENGTH OF MANY FORCES AT WORK THROUGHOUT THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY. ALTHOUGH NEWLY-ELECTED LEADERS ARE YOUNGER, AND ON THE WHOLE BETTER EDUCATED THAN THE OFFICIALS THEY REPLACE, THEY ARE IN MANY CASES INEXPERIENCED AND WILL NEED TIME TO LEARN THEIR JOBS IN A CHANGED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT.

3. THE INITIAL REACTION OF ISRAELI MEDIA HAS BEEN TO NOTE THE SWEEPING VICTORY OF "NATIONALISTS AND RADICALS," TERMS WHICH COVER PLO SUPPORTERS, LEFTISTS AND COMMUNISTS. ARAFAT IN HIS APRIL 16 MEETING WITH SENATOR MATHIAS HAILED THE OUTCOME AS AN OVERWHELMING VICTORY FOR TH PLO. THE CLANDESTINE VOICE OF PALESTINE HAS INTERPRETED THE VOTE AS A CRUSHING DEFEAT FOR KING HUSSEIN. WHILE THERE IS SOME TRUTH IN ALL OF THESE STATEMENTS; THE REALITY IS MORE COMPLICATED AND UNCLEAR.

4. THE ONLY CLEAR SIGNAL IS WEST BANK OPPOSITION TO ISRAELI OCCUPATION. MANY NEW MAYORS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS (ESPECIALLY IN TWO LARGEST TOWNS OF NABLUS AND HEBRON) RODE TO VICTORY ON NATIONALIST SLATES THEREBY CREATING EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS AMONG STUDENTS AND RANK AND FILE ON WHICH THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DELIVER. AS INCREASED PRESSURE FOR CHANGE FROM BELOW MEETS FIRM RESISTENCE FROM MILGOV ABOVE, NEW WEST BANK LEADERS WILL BE CAUGHT IN SAME SQUEEZE WHICH RESULTED IN WIDESPREAD DEMONSTRATIONS AND VIOLENCE IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH.

5. WHETHER THEY LIKE IT OR NOT, NEW WEST BANK OFFICIALS WILL ALSO HAVE TO MAKE THEIR PEACE WITH KING HUSSEIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SINCE WEST BANKERS ARE CRITICALLY DEPENDENT ON AMMAN FOR: PASSPORTS AND ACCESS TO ARB WORLD IN GENERAL, MARKETS, AND FOR SUBSIDIES AND GRANTS. A RESPECTED ISRALI JOURNALIST WHO IS AN EXPERT ON THE WEST BANK, ESTIMATES THAT ONE-THIRD OF THE WEST BANK'S BUDGET STILL COMES FROM AMMAN IN THE FORM OF SALARIES AND SUBSIDIES TO CIVIL SERVANTS AND MODEST MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. THUS, FAILURE TO REACH A MODUS VIVENDI WITH HUSSEIN WOULD

RISK HAVING WEST BANK TIES TO THE ARAB WORLD ATTENUATED WITH A RESULTANT INCREASE IN DEPENDENCE ON THE GOI IN THE FORM OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND THE VARIOUS ISRAELI MINISTRIES THAT OPERATE ON THE WEST BANK UNDER MILGOV AEGIS.

6. ONE NEWLY-ELECTED WEST BANK MAYOR, WHILE STATING THAT THE PLO CURRENTLY SPEAKS FOR ALL PALESTINIANS, GOES ON TO SEE ARAFAT AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AS FULFILLING ESSENTIALLY A WAR-TIME ROLE. ONCE ISRAELI OCCUPATION IS TERMINATED, SOME WEST BANKERS AT ANY RATE DO NOT SEE THEMSELVES AS BEING REPLACED BY RETURNING PLO EMIGRES. THIS NATURAL SITUATION HAS ALREADY EVOKED CONCERN ON PART OF ARAFAT THAT EFFORT MAY BE MADE TO CREATE "ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP" IN PERSONS OF ELECTED WEST BANK OFFICIALS. AT PRESENT, MAYORS AND CITY COUNCILS ARE TAKING POSITION THEIR JOB IS TO RUN MUNICIPALITIES AND THAT POLITICS ON NATIONAL LEVEL IS JOB OF PLO. FACT REMAINS THAT NEW LEADERS ARE FREELY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF LARGEST SINGLE GROUP OF PALESTINIANS AND THIS IS BOUND TO CREATE ANXIETY IN MINDS OF PLO LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS MAINTAIN LIVELY INTEREST OF THOSE WHO HAVE REASON TO FAVOR POSSIBLE EVENTUAL ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP. (ISRAELIS, HUSSEIN).

7. ONE PHENOMENON THAT WILL BEAR CLOSE WATCHING IS PRESENCE OF AVOWED COMMUNISTS FOR FIRST TIME ON CITY CONCILS. WE WERE STRUCK BY IDENTIFICATION OF WEST BANK ARABS WITH THEIR GALILEE BRETHREN AT THE TIME OF THE MARCH 30 DISTURBANCES IN WHICH COMMUNISTS WERE PRIME MOVERS. PRESUMABLY, THE COMMUNISTS AND OTHERS WILL CONTINUE PUSH THIS LINE. WE ARE ALSO STRUCK BY WHAT SEEMS TO BE A GREATER DEGREE OF COORDINATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF VIEWS AND ACTIONS AMONG WEST BANK MUNICIPALITIES. THIS TREND WILL BE HELPED BY THE DEPARTURE OF HEBRON'S FEUDAL CHIEF, SHEIKH JA'ABARI.

8. THE DISTURBING THING IS THAT NOTHING IS BEING DONE TO ADDRESS THE BASIC CAUSE OF WEST BANK FRUSTRATION AND UNREST-THE CONTINUING OCCUPATION. AS LONG AS IT CONTINUES, MILITANTS FROM EITHER SIDE CAN SPARK DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH HAVE RECENTLY SHOWN A DISTURBING TENDENCY TO BECOME MORE AND MORE VIOLENT WITH THE HEIGHTENED RISK OF INJURIES AND DEATHS.
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